LITERARY APPROPRIATIONS OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS FROM THE THIRTEENTH TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Victor and victim: a view of the Anglo-Saxon past in Laȝamon's *Brut*

CAROLE WEINBERG

The purpose of Laȝamon, parish priest of Areley-Kings towards the end of the twelfth and/or beginning of the thirteenth century, in writing the *Brut* was – as he tells us himself – to recount *wat heo ihoten weoren and wonene heo comen, / þa Englene londe ærest ahten* 'what they were called and whence they came who first possessed the land of England' (8–9).[1] And while his engagement with the past history of the English is evident, his creative imagination was clearly fired by the content of his main source, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, a mid-twelfth-century verse history which slotted the Anglo-Saxons into an even earlier period of insular history, a reading of the past in which the Britons held sovereignty over the land before it passed to the Anglo-Saxons.

Following Wace, Laȝamon recounts in the latter part of his narrative how, during the reign of the post-Arthurian British king, Carric, the Saxons in Britain banded together with a conqueror from Africa called Gurmund, seized the land and besieged Carric at Cirencester. But Carric proved a stubborn defender:

> Wel ofte Kariches men comen ut of burhȝen
> and ræsden an Gurmunde mid ræȝere strenðe,
> and sloȝen of his folke feole þusende,
> and sende heom to helle, heðene hundes alle.
> Karic wes swiðe goud cniht and swiðe wel he heold his fiht,

[1] All citations are from the Cotton Caligula text of Laȝamon's *Brut* and all translations of this text are from *Laȝamon's 'Brut'*, ed. and trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (Harlow, 1995). References to Wace are from *Le Roman de Brut de Wace*, ed. I. Arnold, 2 vols. (Paris, 1938–1940), while references to Geoffrey of Monmouth are from *The 'Historia Regum Britannie' of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, I, or II (The Variant Version), ed. N. Wright (Cambridge, 1984 and 1988).

and faste he heold Chirchestre mid strengðe þan mæste
þat ne mihte Gurmund næuere mæren his ferde
ar he lette heom mid ginnen biswiken wiðinnen. (14,570–7)[2]

The stratagem used by Gurmund to defeat Carric was to set fire to Cirencester by having sparrows return to their roosts in the city carrying lit pieces of tinder in nutshells attached to their feet. Laȝamon paints a graphic picture of a town ablaze, the wind fanning the flames, the inhabitants trapped and engulfed by fire (14,614–28). Laȝamon's contemporaries may have been unfamiliar with the story of Gurmund, but the graphic description of a town burning would have struck home. The town of Worcester, only some ten miles downstream from Areley-Kings, suffered at least four devastating fires between 1113 and 1202, memorable not only for the damage they caused, but also for the part they played in the campaign for the canonization of an Anglo-Saxon bishop. In 1113 a major fire broke out in Worcester, the flames spreading throughout the town and setting the roof of Worcester Cathedral alight. While the interior of the church was destroyed, amazingly, it seemed, the tomb of Wulfstan, the last Anglo-Saxon bishop of Worcester (1062–1095) survived unscathed. In 1147 fire once again engulfed Worcester and the cathedral was badly damaged. Bernard, bishop of St David's, in Worcester at the time, testified to the miraculous fact that, while the fire consumed all in its path, the tapestry spread over Wulfstan's tomb remained untouched by the flames. In 1189 yet another devastating fire set Worcester ablaze, and again in 1202, when the cathedral suffered damage once more.[3] It was after this fire, coinciding with the growing

[2] 'Carric's men repeatedly sallied out from the town and attacked Gurmund with furious might, and slew many thousands of his followers, despatching them, all heathen dogs, to hell. Carric was a very skilful warrior and conducted his defence very successfully, and stoutly defended Cirencester to the utmost of his power so that at no time was Gurmund able to defeat his forces until, by a trick, he caused them to be destroyed from within.'

In the Variant Version of Geoffrey's *Historia* (§186–7), we hear that Gurmund, a pagan African king who has conquered Ireland, is recruited by the Saxons to drive the Britons under the post-Arthurian king, Carric, into Wales, and who then hands the country over to them. This is referred to by both Wace and Laȝamon early in their narratives (see pp. 27–8 of this paper and n. 18 below), but described in greater detail in its proper chronological context (lines 14,400–683) as part of the continuing narrative of conflict between the Saxons and the Britons for sovereignty of the land.

[3] For reference to the fire of 1189, see H. R. Luard, *Annales Prioratus de Wigornia AD 1–1377*, Annales Monastici, 4 vols., RS 36 (London, 1869), IV, p. 386. The fires of

interest in the cult of Wulfstan, that Mauger, the Norman bishop of Worcester, after consultation with the chapter, petitioned Pope Innocent III for Wulfstan's canonization. Pope Innocent had a commission of distinguished English clerics appointed to investigate the claims of sainthood. The commission's report, attesting to the miracles worked through Wulfstan's mediation, was conveyed to Rome in person by a delegation of Worcester monks. In April 1203 Wulfstan was canonized, and on 14 May a papal bull declared publicly the circumstances of Wulfstan's elevation, including testimony produced by the citizens of Worcester attesting to the many miracles performed at his tomb.[4]

Given the proximity of Areley-Kings to Worcester, local interest generated by the canonization of Wulfstan may have been the spur for Laȝamon's decision to record the Anglo-Saxon past for his contemporaries.[5] Furthermore he may very possibly have seen the now lost biography of Wulfstan, written in English sometime between 1095 and 1113 by Coleman, Wulfstan's chaplain for the last fifteen years of the bishop's life. Coleman, it has been argued, chose to write in English at a time when Latin was the commonly used and accepted linguistic medium for hagiographical biography, 'as a piece of conscious revivalism to emphasize the merits of Anglo-Saxon England',[6] and he could have provided Laȝamon with an important precedent for the use of English at a time when Latin and Anglo-Norman were the recognized languages of historical narrative. Regarding Laȝamon's ability to read Coleman's eleventh-century English, Laȝamon himself used what has been described as an 'archaic' form of English harking back to Old English models as his linguistic medium for narrating the early history of this island, and we know that in the early thirteenth century the 'Tremulous Scribe' was at work in Worcester Cathedral Library, annotating Old English texts.[7]

1133, 1147 and 1202 are discussed by E. Mason, *St Wulfstan of Worcester c. 1008–1095* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 272–3, 275–6 and 279.

[4] Mason, *St Wulfstan*, pp. 279–80.

[5] I discussed Laȝamon's interest in and knowledge of local topography and history as reflected in the *Brut* in '"By a noble church on the bank of the Severn": a Regional View of Laȝamon's *Brut*', *Leeds Studies in English* NS 26 (1995), pp. 49–62.

[6] A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1974 and 1982), I, p. 88.

[7] See C. Franzen, *The Tremulous Hand of Worcester: a Study of Old English in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1991), and W. Collier, '"Englishness" and the Worcester Tremulous Hand', *Leeds Studies in English* NS 26 (1995), pp. 35–47.

Laȝamon, like Coleman before him, made a deliberate choice to use English as his literary medium. What statement was Laȝamon making in the *Brut* about the Anglo-Saxon past, and what relevance, if any, did it have to Laȝamon's Anglo-Norman present?

Laȝamon's poetic history is, paradoxically, very largely a record, not of the earliest Anglo-Saxon kings, but of the earliest kings of the Britons, beginning with Brutus, Aeneas's great-grandson, and concluding with the reign of Cadwallader. It is only in the last two thousand lines or so of the poem (over sixteen thousand lines in all), that Laȝamon focuses the narrative more directly and in detail on the early Anglo-Saxon kings of Northumbria in the struggle between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons for sovereignty over the island. The poem ends with the Britons dispossessed of their land and driven into Wales, and the Anglo-Saxon kings politically supreme:

> And Ænglisce kinges walden þas londes,
> And Bruttes hit loseden, þis lond and þas leoden,
> þat næuere seoðden mære kinges neoren here.
> Þa ȝet ne com þæs ilke dæi, beo heonneuorð alse hit mæi;
> iwurðe þet iwurðe, iwurðe Godes wille. (16,091–5)[8]

To see the shape of the past in Laȝamon's *Brut* as 'a recurrent pattern of land and people subject to continual conquest', and to describe it as a history 'not of the Britons but of the land of Britain', may be one way of accommodating the presence of both Britons and Anglo-Saxons in Laȝamon's narrative.[9] But while this view of the poem as a history of the land does not sit oddly with the presence in it of the Britons, the first settlers and rulers of this island, it is more difficult to account for his lengthy and largely sympathetic portrayal of their struggles against the treacherous Saxon would-be invaders, forerunners of the Anglo-Saxons who settled the island, the eventual successors of the Britons in ruling it, and who changed its name from Britain to England. But not only does Laȝamon express anti-Saxon sentiments in his poem; he deliberately

[8] 'And English kings gained sovereignty over these lands, and the Britons lost it, lost this land and the sovereignty of this nation so that never since that time have they been kings here. Such a day has not yet come, whatever may come to pass hereafter; come what may, let God's will be done.'

[9] M. Swanton, *English Literature before Chaucer* (Harlow, 1987), p. 176.

deepens the anti-Saxon perspective he found in Wace.[10] Laȝamon's antipathy towards the Saxons in the *Brut* has troubled critics of the poem. They have found it a matter of some perplexity that an English poet, writing in English when Latin and Anglo-Norman were the more usual languages of historical record, should sympathize with the Britons and hold up the Saxons to execration.[11]

One way of defending Laȝamon from the accusation that he vilified his Saxon ancestors is to claim that he made a deliberate distinction between the treacherous Saxons and the Angles, a term used almost exclusively towards the end of the poem for those who, 'untouched by Saxon guilt', were the true ancestors of the English, and gave their name to the land of England.[12] Under detailed examination, however, this hypothesis fails; Neil Wright points out that in the *Brut*, Hengest, the treacherous invading Saxon leader, describes his homeland as *Angles* (6,910–12), in direct contradiction to the equivalent passage in Wace (6,729–32), where Hengest states that he and his men come from *Saixone*. Wright argues, convincingly, that the distinction in usage between Saxons and Angles as titles for the ancestors of the English is not judgemental, but significant only in that Laȝamon uses the term *Angles* to identify the geographical origin of those Saxons who settled the land and to explain the etymology of the term 'England' (14,668–73).[13]

An alternative explanation for Laȝamon's hostile treatment of the Saxon ancestors of the English is offered by James Noble. He also sees a difference between Laȝamon's attitude towards the Saxon invaders who appear in the Arthurian section of the narrative and his attitude towards the post-Arthurian Saxons who settled the land, but argues that it is due to a 'distinction in the poet's mind between the would-be Saxon usurpers who were ultimately banished from Britain during Arthur's reign and *þa ilke þa weorn icorne* ['those chosen'] (14,677) – i.e. the Germanic

[10] See J. Noble, 'Laȝamon's "Ambivalence" Reconsidered', *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon's 'Brut'*, ed. F. Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 171–82. Noble cites several instances in the poem which 'attest to a systematic attempt on Laȝamon's part to vilify the Saxons to an even greater extent than Wace had succeeded in doing' (p. 172).

[11] See, e.g. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), p. 105, and D. Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977), p. 110.

[12] I. J. Kirby, 'Angles and Saxons in Laȝamon's Brut', *SN* 36 (1964), pp. 51–62.

[13] N. Wright, 'Angles and Saxons in Laȝamon's *Brut*: a Reassessment', *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon's 'Brut'*, pp. 161–70.

immigrants who, some years later, are invited to assume stewardship of the island in the wake of Gurmund's invasion'.[14] Thus 'the apparent distinction in Laȝamon's mind between these two groups of Saxons who appear in his poem must be acknowledged as the source of the fact that the *Brut* qualifies as both a pro-English and an anti-Saxon statement'.[15] This second group, especially once converted to Christianity by St Augustine, 'gradually displace the Britons as heroes of Laȝamon's chronicle, the Britons demonstrating in each successive episode the degeneracy to which they have become prone without an Arthur to lead them'.[16]

It is certainly true to say that, as in Wace, the historical moment at which the name 'Britain' is replaced by 'England' occurs in Laȝamon's poem when Gurmund invades the country with his Saxon allies, devastates Britain, and the Saxons gain possession of the island.[17] But this moment of transference of dominion is anticipated much earlier in both poems, at the point in the narrative when the Britons, having

[14] Noble, 'Laȝamon's "Ambivalence" Reconsidered', pp. 171–82, at p. 181. Lines 14,668–75 are central to Noble's argument (I have cited both text and translation in this instance from Noble, p.180):

> Bisiden Allemaine is a lond Angles ihaten.
> Þer weoren iborne Þa ilke Þe weorn icorne.
> Þa Gurmund an hond bitahte a Þis kinelond
> alse he heom a forward hædde ȝif he hit biwunne.
> Al his biheste he heom bilaste.
> Of Englen heo comen and Þer-of heo nomen nomen.
> and letten heom cleopien ful iwis Þat folc Þat wes Ænglis.
> & Þis lond heo cleopeden Ængle-lond for hit wes al on heore hond.

'Near to Alemaine is a land called Angle where were born those chosen to inherit this land should Gurmund succeed in winning it; he had promised it to them and he fulfilled his promise. From Angle-land they hailed and derived their name. They called themselves English, and, since it had been given into their possession, they called this land England.'

[15] *Ibid*., p.181.

[16] *Ibid*. Noble concurs here with the view of F. Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut: the Poem and its Sources* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 174–5. Wright holds a similar view, commenting that 'at the end of the narrative we find it is the English who serve as a model of unity and civilization' ('Angles and Saxons', pp. 169–70).

[17] Wace follows the First Variant Version of Geoffrey's *Historia* in placing the transference of political power from the Britons to the English at this chronological point in his narrative (13,635–58). The Vulgate Version defers the passage of dominion until late in the seventh century. See Wright, 'Angles and Saxons', pp. 162–4.

vanquished the giants, take possession of Albion. Having explained the change of the island's name from Albion to Britain, the latter name devised for it by its conqueror Brutus *æfter himseluan* 'in keeping with his own' (977), Laȝamon, following Wace, anticipates the later change from Britain to England:

> Gurmund draf out þe Brutuns; and his folc wes ihaten Sexuns,
> of ane ende of Alemaine, Angles wes ihaten.
> Of Angles comen Englisce men, and Englelond heo hit clepeden.
> Þa Englisce ouercomen þe Brutuns and brouhten heom þer neoðere
> þat neofer seoðden heo ne arisen ne her ræden funden. (989–93)[18]

The wording in Laȝamon at this point in the narrative does not refer to the granting of sovereignty to the Saxons by Gurmund. Instead it sets up a parallel between the occupation of Albion by the Trojan exiles under Brutus and that of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons under Gurmund, two transfers of power, each in turn bringing changes to the cultural identity of the land. These two conquests are paradigmatic of a history of settlement characterized by conquest and cultural change, a pattern specifically referred to by Laȝamon early on in the poem when the history of King Lud is narrated, whose successor, Cassibellaunus, was king of the Britons at the time of the Roman invasion under Julius Caesar:

> Swa is al þis lond iuaren for uncuðe leoden
> þeo þis londe hæbbeð biwunnen and eft beoð idriuen hennene;
> and eft hit biȝetten oðeræ þe uncuðe weoren
> and falden þene ælden nomen æfter heore wille
> of gode þe burȝen and wenden heore nomen,
> swa þat nis her burh nan in þissere Bruttene
> þat habbe hire nome ælð þe me arst hire onstalde. (3,549–55)[19]

However lengthy and glorious the rule of the Britons is, it does not save

[18] 'Gurmund drove out the Britons, and his people were called Saxons, from a region of Germany which was called Angles. The English came from Angles, and they called the land England. The English overcame the Britons and brought them into subjection so that they never rose again nor prospered here.'

[19] 'So this whole country has suffered because of the foreigners who have conquered this land and then been driven out again; and then other foreigners have got possession of it and, in accordance with their wishes, have suppressed the old names of the major towns and changed their names, so that here in this island of Britain there is no town which retains the old name which was originally conferred upon it.'

them from domination by the Romans at one stage in their history and, ultimately, from displacement by the Anglo-Saxons. The fate of the Anglo-Saxon rulers, although beyond the narrative framework of the *Brut*, is parallel to that of the Britons; domination by the Danes at one stage in their history and, ultimately, displacement by the Normans. Those who are victorious at one historical moment become victims at another.

As to the more sympathetic treatment of the Anglo-Saxons compared with the Britons in the latter part of the poem, this is to simplify Laȝamon's narrative approach.[20] Ælfric, an early pagan Northumbrian king responsible for the massacre of British clerics, is referred to as *forcuðest alre kinge* 'the most wicked of kings' (14,878, repeated at 14,903). Yet not much further on in the narrative Ælfric and the British king Cadwan, previously at war, are reconciled, and Laȝamon now praises both kings for putting the interests of the country and people above their own territorial claims:

> Þer iwurðen sahte þa kinges beie tweien,
> sæhte and some; heo custen wel ilome.
> Þas kinges wel ilomen mid luue heom icusten;
> eorl custe oðer swulc hit weore his broðer,
> sweines þer ploȝeden - blisse wes mid þeinen.
> Æluric wes king on londe bi norðen þere Humbre;
> and Cadwan wes king sele a suð half þere Humbre;
> blisse wes on hireden mid balden þat kingen. (14,991–8)[21]

It is not surprising, given Laȝamon's English ancestry – the proem gives his father's name as Leouenað (2) – and his priesthood, that the treatment of Oswald, Anglo-Saxon ruler of Northumbria, martyred in the *Brut* at the hands of Penda, the pagan Anglo-Saxon ruler of Mercia, is

[20] L. Johnson, 'Reading the Past in Laȝamon's *Brut*', *The Text and Tradition of Laȝamon's 'Brut'*, pp. 141–59, argues for a more complex attitude towards the Anglo-Saxons than simply a reversal of sympathies once they have been converted to Christianity. In what follows, my observations support her view.

[21] 'There reconciliation was effected between the two kings who kissed repeatedly; amity and concord were brought about. Again and again the kings kissed each other lovingly; noblemen embraced each other like brothers, warriors made merry there – the leaders were content. Ælfric was ruler of the land to the north of the Humber, and Cadwan was an excellent ruler south of the Humber; there was contentment among the followers of both those valiant kings.'

noticeably more sympathetic than that found in Wace. While Wace sees Oswald as noble and a man of courage (14,437), Laȝamon describes him twice as one of God's chosen elect (15,635 and 15,665). As Penda cuts him down, Laȝamon points out that *þis wes Seint Oswald þe a murðe wes aquald* 'this was Saint Oswald who was murderously done to death' (15,688), the title *Seint*, as pointed out by Françoise Le Saux, not accorded Oswald in Wace, but repeated by Laȝamon at line 15,694.[22] Laȝamon portrays Oswald as a man spiritually inspired but naively trusting, whose trust is betrayed. Surprisingly however, Laȝamon paraphrases a prayer to the Cross which is in Wace, though he adds a pious element not in his source: Oswald has his men pray that should Penda prove treacherous God will avenge the wrong (15,671). This is, however, a somewhat odd sentiment in view of what happens subsequently to Penda: in a version which contradicts both history and Wace, Laȝamon has Oswald's successor, Oswy, killed in battle against Penda – the reverse of Wace – while Penda, badly wounded, flees and is heard of no more (15,834–47). This same Penda who, captured in battle by the British king Cadwalan, becomes his ally and a betrayer of fellow Anglo-Saxon kings, and is depicted consistently as a cruel and most treacherous king, is never specifically referred to in the poem as a pagan/heathen. And he is the same Penda who Laȝamon reminds us, in a comment not in Wace, *wes Mærwales fader, Mildburȝe alde-uader* 'was the father of Mærwal, the grandfather of Mildburge' (15,478). Mildburge is the female saint, descended from the Mercian royal family, who founded, in the late seventh century, the religious house of Much Wenlock in Shropshire, some twenty miles from Areley-Kings.[23]

The account of King Edwin of Northumbria, Oswald's predecessor, makes no mention of his Christianity although he was a devout Christian for the latter part of his seventeen-year reign, and his name in the Caligula manuscript of the poem has the contemporary Latin gloss *Sanctus Edwinus*. The focus, rather, is on his closeness to the British king Cadwalan in their youth and their later conflict over the sovereignty of the land. In speaking of the ravaging of the country by Edwin when he and the British king Cadwalan fall out (*his here wrohte on londe / harmes vniuȝe* 'his army wrought great havoc in the land', 15,204), Laȝamon's

[22] Le Saux, *Laȝamon's 'Brut': the Poem and its Sources*, pp. 165–7.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

elaboration of Wace turns Edwin's abduction of a British woman into an abduction and rape, making Edwin's conduct in this instance seem more heinous.

In contrast, Cadwalan, a Christian king but at enmity with both Oswald and his predecessor, Edwin, is repeatedly described in such terms as *þan gode* 'the good' (15,301) and *þæ kene* 'the valiant' (15,438, 15,505 and 15,585). At Whitsuntide Cadwalan holds court in London (as did his predecessors Uther and Arthur), and the description of the assembly is reminiscent of that held by earlier kings of the Britons.[24] We are told that there was great rejoicing at this assembly among those who came to honour the valiant Cadwalan, for *þe king wes swiðe treowe – his treouðe wel he iheold* 'for the king was a man of great integrity – he held faithfully to his word' (15,746). Following the death in battle of Oswy, brother of the martyred King Oswald, Oswy's son, Osric, who had been lovingly reared in Cadwalan's household, successsfully petitions Cadwalan, his liege-lord, for his father's land. At this point in the narrative Laȝamon adds an approving note:

> God king wes Cadwaðlan, swa him wes icunden;
> he wes king hire seouen and feouwerti ȝere. (15,856–7)[25]

To describe Cadwalan as a good king does not entail praising a pagan since at this chronological point in the narrative the Britons, like the Anglo-Saxons, are Christian. Yet, as has been seen in the case of the Anglo-Saxon king Ælfric, a pagan king can be condemned at one moment for a dastardly act and recognized the next as acting in the best interests of the country. Equally, a Christian king is not immune to criticism. Cadwalan, described as a good king and ruler of the country, is also responsible, early in his reign, for bringing misery to the land when he and Edwin, childhood friends but subsequently enemies, go to war:

> Ædwine wes kempe; his men weoren kene.
> Cadwaðlan wes cniht god and he hafde muchel mod.
> Edwine wende ouer Humbre and Cadwaðlan to Lundene;
> þas kinges weoren wrað – þa aræs þa weore.

[24] Cf. lines 15,736–46 with lines 9,229–41, 9,962–4, 11,085–9 and 12,130–5.

[25] 'Cadwalan was, in keeping with his nature, a good king; he was king here for forty-seven years.'

Heo riden and heo arnden, heo herȝede and heo barnde;
heo sloȝen and heo nomen al þat heo neh comen;
wa wes þan beondes þa on londe wuneden. (15,145–51)[26]

What is significant here is the lack of differentiation between Anglo-Saxons and Britons; the emphasis is rather on the harmful effects of regnal strife on the inhabitants of the country.[27]

It is understandable that Laȝamon, a parish priest, should highlight any moral shortcomings, and the heathen Saxon invaders of the Arthurian section of the narrative, seeking more often by foul than fair means to gain control of the land, are roundly condemned, even though they are ethnically at one with the Anglo-Saxons and thus the English. But Laȝamon's moral disdain is also clearly visible in the lengthy episode covering the treachery of Vortiger, British usurper of the British throne, responsible for inviting the Saxons, along with their chief, Hengest, to settle, and through marriage to Hengest's daughter, Rouwenne, plunging the country back into paganism.[28] Vortiger is described as *of vfele swiðe iwaer* 'well-practised in wrong-doing' (6,669 and 6,691), *swike ful deorne* 'a most subtle deceiver' (6,805), and, most frequently, *of elchen vuele . . . war* 'skilled in every evil practice' (6,899, 6,929, 6,956, 7,063, etc.). Laȝamon emphasizes, in over a thousand lines, Vortiger's treacherous deeds both before and after seizing the throne (6,487–8,101), and when Vortimer leads the Britons in an uprising against Vortiger, war between son and father is legitimized by the righteousness of the cause and the devout Christianity of Vortimer. In this instance warfare is seen as necessary to rid the country of a traitor and to restore the Christian faith.

As I have tried to show, any statement Laȝamon is making about the past cannot but be influenced by his background and outlook as a priest, and he often brings a moral/Christian dimension into his account of both

[26] 'Edwin was a noted warrior; his followers were bold men. Cadwalan was a brave warrior and he had great courage. Edwin crossed the Humber, and Cadwalan returned to London; both kings were enraged – war followed. They rode and galloped, they harried and burned; they slaughtered and seized all they came upon; the farmers, for whom the land was their livelihood, suffered misery.'

[27] The importance of firm regnal control in fostering unity within a kingdom, irrespective of the ethnic origins of the inhabitants, is discussed by S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), ch. 8.

[28] The spelling of the names used here (Vortiger and Rouwenne) conforms to that used by Laȝamon.

British and early Anglo-Saxon kings.[29] But one needs also to acknowledge another Laȝamon, the historian who records that Julius Caesar, the first conqueror of the Britons and a pagan, was at the same time the man who *makede þane kalender þe dihteð þane moneð and þe ȝer* 'made the calendar which orders the months and the years', and *dihte feole domes þe ȝet stondeð ine Rome* 'made many laws still in force in Rome' (3,599–600), facts not stated in Wace. Although Caesar is a ruthless adversary, Laȝamon at the same time admits that he is *wis and swiðe iwar* 'wise and very shrewd' (3,619, 3,653, 3,848, etc.). While acknowledging Caesar's inevitable damnation as a pagan, it is nevertheless a matter of some concern for Laȝamon that such a man, the wisest man on earth in his time, *into helle sculde gan* 'should ever go to hell' (3,601).

This observation concerning Caesar is symptomatic of a narrative stance which runs through much of the *Brut* and which promotes a more detached and less partisan view of the historical process as it affects the different racial and cultural entities vying for dominion. Right from the beginning of his poem Laȝamon seems to have conceived it as an account of the different peoples who shaped the history of England. The choice of an archaized form of English may have more to do with the need for an appropriate literary medium 'to mediate the history of the past' than with

[29] The Christian dimension within which the past operates is marked in the prologue by Laȝamon's description of the first inhabitants of the island as those who occupied the land

> æfter þan flode þe from Drihtene com,
> þe al her aquelde quic þat he funde,
> buten Noe and Sem, Iaphet and Cham,
> and heore four wiues þe mid heom were on archen. (10–13)

'after the Flood sent by God, which destroyed all living creatures here on earth, save Noah and Shem, Japhet and Ham, and their four wives who were with them in the ark'.

References to the Flood were widespread, since the period from the Creation to the Flood and from the Flood to Abraham counted as two of the seven ages into which biblical history was divisible, and history for medieval annalists and historians was a continuum, going back ultimately to the Creation. In a twelfth-century manuscript of the *Worcester Chronicle* (Oxford, Corpus Christi College 157), thought to have belonged to John of Worcester and localized, therefore, at Worcester Cathedral Priory in the early twelfth century, there is, among other introductory diagrammatic genealogies of Anglo-Saxon kings and bishops, one which draws a direct line of descent from Adam, the four sons of Noah, and Abraham (fol. 47).

a desire to focus specifically on the historical identity of the Anglo-Saxons through their language.[30]

Laȝamon accepts it as a fact of history that the Anglo-Saxons succeeded the British as conquerors of the land. But interest in the English past is expressed within a context of historical continuity between British and English, based on their dual and successive occupation of the land. Laȝamon uses linguistic detail to both differentiate between and link the two groups of inhabitants. He shows an awareness of the different languages spoken by the British and the English respectively, explaining, for example, that Uther's cognomen, *Pendragun an Brutisc* 'Pendragon in the British language', is *Draken-hefd an Englisc* 'Dragon's-head in English' (9,097). At the same time, however, there is linguistic overlap. While the name of Arthur's shield *wes on Bruttisc Pridwen ihaten* 'was Pridwen in the British tongue' (10,554), Arthur's helmet, which had belonged to his father, Uther, was called *Goswhit* (10,552) – the English term 'goose-white' – a name omitted in Wace. Likewise, the occasional references to Arthur as 'King of England' and the similarity of his cognomen 'Britain's darling' to that given to Alfred the Great, 'England's darling', in early Middle English,[31] indicates a mode of thought which elides the ethnic distinction between Britons and Anglo-Saxons, and constructs a common heritage for the English.

What the unfolding historical record also reveals, however, is that the transfer of political power can obliterate the identities of the conquered. Twice in the narrative Laȝamon comments on the changing names of the country's capital city, called *Troye þe Newe* and later *Trinouant* by Brutus, then changed to *Lundene* by *Englisce men* and, bringing the historical record up to date, *Londres* by the *Frensca* (1,016–31 and 3,529–48). Laȝamon's emphasis throughout the narrative on the origin of placenames may be one way of recording the past, while simultaneously testifying to the suppression of this past through linguistic change.[32]

[30] L. Johnson, 'Tracking Laȝamon's *Brut*', *Leeds Studies in English* NS 22 (1991), pp. 1–27, at p. 15.

[31] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *dereling* 1(c).

[32] Laȝamon's *Brut* is not the only poem to comment on the way language operates to obfuscate the past. The Anglo-Norman *Le Roman de Waldef*, written c. 1200–1210, acknowledges the linguistic displacement of the English past as a result of the Norman conquest and the change in language, but is confident that this past can be recovered through translation:

Laȝamon's account of the changing populations brings the historical record up to date by including a reference, as we have seen, to the most recent conquerors of the country, the Normans. In the only two references within the text to these people, Laȝamon refers to them once as *Frensca* and once as *Normans*, seeming not to differentiate between the two terms. The reference to the *Frensca* describes them as gaining control of London through conquest (1,030–1) while the Normans are seen as coming with *heore nið-craften* 'their evil ways' and harming the country (3,547–8). Noble regards these two negative comments as signalling Laȝamon's antagonism towards the Normans, 'the monstrous Normans who had all-too-recently deprived the English of their rightful heritage'.[33] For Lesley Johnson, however, there needs to be more evidence if a case is to be made for an anti-Norman stance.[34] Both Noble and Johnson, however, agree that the way events are narrated in the *Brut* would have encouraged those who formed the original audience for the poem to recognize or seek 'connections between earlier and later historical epochs and to exercise their historical imaginations in using a narrative about the political formations of the past to meditate upon those of the present'.[35] A view of the past in which both Britons and Anglo-Saxons held and then lost

'When the Normans seized the land, the great histories that had been made by the English and recounted by them were left behind, on account of the peoples shifting and the languages changing. Since then much has been translated, and greatly enjoyed by many, such as the Brut, such as Tristan' (39–47).

The poem has been edited by A. J. Holden (Cologny-Genèvre, 1984), and the translation of lines 39–47 is from S. Crane, 'Social Aspects of Bilingualism in the Thirteenth Century', *Thirteenth Century England* 6, ed. M. Prestwich, R. H. Britnell and R. Frame (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 103–15, at p. 105. In Crane's view 'it is unlikely that *Waldef* and the many *Bruts* and *Tristans* translate from English estoires, but such an assertion is itself a way of linking Anglo-Norman to English culture' (p. 105).

[33] Noble, 'Laȝamon's "Ambivalence" Reconsidered', p. 181. Le Saux, likewise, infers some animosity on Laȝamon's part towards the Normans (*Laȝamon's 'Brut': the Poem and its Sources*, pp. 80–3, p. 175 n. 6, p. 222 n. 131 and p. 230), while M. Shichtman describes Laȝamon as 'a priest to a vanquished people', writing for an audience 'that had to tolerate but never fully accepted the authority and enthusiasms of its French conquerors' ('Gawain in Wace and Laȝamon: a Case of Metahistorical Evolution', *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, ed. L. A. Finke and M. B. Shichtman (Ithaca and London, 1987), pp. 103–19, at p. 114).

[34] Johnson, 'Reading the Past in Laȝamon's *Brut*', pp. 157–8.

[35] *Ibid.*, p.158.

political power could significantly affect the attitude towards a Norman presence contextualized within a historical pattern of changing populations in England.

The difficulty of making categorical statements regarding the attitude taken by Laȝamon towards the Norman present becomes apparent once we return him to his own time and locality. Wendy Collier cites a number of localized Worcestershire texts from the two centuries after the Norman Conquest in which anti-Norman/anti-French sentiments are expressed.[36] Yet Laȝamon himself, though of English parentage on his father's side, was clearly fluent in French. Moreover, the church at Areley-Kings, where Laȝamon was parish priest, was a dependent chapel of Martley church which, together with its dependent chapels, was a possession of the Benedictine abbey of St Mary at Cormeilles in Normandy.[37] And in the movement for the canonization of Wulfstan Laȝamon would have seen an example of the Norman present encompassing the Anglo-Saxon past. It was, after all, Mauger, a Norman, who oversaw the arrangements for Wulfstan's canonization in 1203, although it has been viewed as an act less of devotion to the Anglo-Saxon saint than of greed for the income from pilgrimage to the shrine.[38]

Another instance of cross-cultural linkage reaches to the highest level of government. In 1207 King John, disputing the papal appointment of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury, appealed to a particular legend circulating about St Wulfstan which John interpreted as demonstrating Wulfstan's belief in the right of the monarch alone to appoint the higher clergy of the realm.[39] Furthermore, King John, himself a visitor to and supporter of Worcester Cathedral, adopted Wulfstan as his patron saint and insisted on being buried alongside him in Worcester Cathedral.

[36] Collier, '"Englishness" and the Worcester Tremulous Hand', pp. 41–3. Collier includes Laȝamon in her list of those who 'had no good opinion of the Normans' (p. 42).

[37] See Weinberg, '"By a noble church on the bank of the Severn": a Regional View of Laȝamon's *Brut*', p. 52.

[38] *Lawman: 'Brut'*, trans. R. Allen (London, 1992), p. xix. It is of relevance that 'adopting English saints and heroes and finding continuities between Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest history served the Norman and Plantagenet dynasties' ideological claim to a long heritage in England' (Crane, 'Social Aspects of Bilingualism', pp. 103–15, p. 104).

[39] Mason, *St Wulfstan of Worcester*, pp. 113–14 and 281–2.

In the event, an Angevin king ended up lying between two Anglo-Saxon bishops of Worcester, St Oswald and St Wulfstan.[40]

A recurrent theme in Laȝamon's account of events in the past is that of a country vulnerable to internal strife and external attack. Kings who rule firmly and peacefully are commended even though these same kings may be subjected to disapproving comments concerning other less favourable attributes. Contextualizing King John within this view of king and country leaves him falling far short of good kingship, and an early thirteenth-century audience might be less concerned with the cultural affinities of King John than with the dangers facing England caused by a king who had antagonized his barons to the point of rebellion and was, at his death, 'struggling not to lose his kingdom to an invading foreign prince'.[41]

Whatever connections may have been intended or made between the view of the Anglo-Saxons in the *Brut* and the contemporary world of Laȝamon, the conclusion of the poem has *Ænglisce* kings ruling the country, the Britons having lost sovereignty and with no knowing when they will regain it. Laȝamon ends the poem with the line *iwurðe þet iwurðe, iwurðe Godes wille* 'come what may, let God's will be done'. This appears to be a proverbial saying and is extant in two other relevant texts.[42] In the early Middle English *Proverbs of Alfred*, (proverbial material ascribed to King Alfred), the saying is quoted in the context of man's obligation in the weakness and poverty of old age to thank God for all his goodness, 'and wheresoever you go, say at the end, come what may, may God's will be done'. A similar sense of putting one's trust in God in adverse circumstances, this time political rather than personal, is implied when the saying is quoted at the end of the entry for the year 1066 in the 'D' version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[43] This annal concludes with William

[40] *Ibid*., pp. 282–3.

[41] R. V. Turner, *King John* (Harlow, 1994), p. 1.

[42] See Le Saux, *Laȝamon's 'Brut': the Poem and its Sources*, pp. 219–22. The modern English translation of the proverbial saying in these two texts is my own.

[43] D. Whitelock argues that the 'D' version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Cotton Tiberius B iv) was either brought to Worcester for use in compiling the *Worcester Chronicle* or, alternatively, that there was available to the compiler a manuscript very like 'D', but not 'D' itself, as the *Worcester Chronicle* has none of the Scottish entries of 'D'. See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation*, ed. D. Whitelock with D. C. Douglas and S. I. Tucker (London, 1961), p. xvi.

returning to Normandy, leaving Bishop Odo and Earl William behind, and we are told that these two 'built castles far and wide throughout the land, oppressing the unhappy people, and things went ever from bad to worse'. At the end of the annal are the words *Wurðe god se ende þonne God wylle* 'may the end be good when God wills it'.[44] Le Saux argues against any connection between these three occurrences of the proverb other than 'the similarity of the situations described', the context in all three instances being one of helplessness.[45] In her view Laȝamon is expressing helplessness in the face of Norman domination. But the uncertain future facing, once again, a strife-torn England and its inhabitants might provide a more appropriate early thirteenth-century context for the closing line of Laȝamon's *Brut*.[46]

[44] The word *god* is interlined, possibly by a later hand. See *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–1899), I, p. 200.

[45] Le Saux, *Laȝamon's 'Brut': the Poem and its Sources*, p. 222.

[46] I wish to thank Dr Lesley Johnson and Professor Donald Scragg for reading earlier drafts of this paper and for their helpful suggestions.